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The International Office for Human Rights – Action on Colombia (Oidhaco), calls immediate attention to the grave situation of risk faced by Human Rights Defenders and social leaders in Colombia. Concerns deepen for their security situation and protection in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

We condemn and reject the murder of Human Rights Defender Marco Rivadeneira, in , Putumayo, Colombia on 19 March 2020. Mr. Rivadeneira was President of the Puerto Asís Farmer’s Association (Asopuertoasís) and represented the southwestern region of Colombia in the Operational Committee of the Coordination Colombia – Europe – United States (CCEEU), one of the three main networks of Colombian Human Rights Organisations working in alliance with Oidhaco.

Mr. Rivadeneira was a well-known and recognized community leader, who participated in several national human rights networks, and as a result, was in permanent dialogue with the Colombian state. He accompanied communities in Putumayo in the process of substitution of illicit crops in accordance with the agreements in the Peace Accord. Furthermore, this week an assassination plan was revealed to kill Jani Silva, who is also a community leader in Putumayo, in the Peasant Farmer Reserve of Perla Amazónica (ZRCPA). It is of considerable concern that the murder of Mr. Rivadeneira, took place a short time after the declaration made by the Minister of Interior in Putumayo, which equated the killings of Human Rights Defenders as being comparable to people killed during mobile phone robberies.

On the 19 March 2020, two other social leaders were also killed: Julio Sandoval Chía (Norte de Santander) and Ángel Ovidio Quintero (Antioquia). On the 24 March 2020, two indigenous leaders, Omar and Ernesto Guasiruma, members of the same family, were killed in their homes, they were complying with quarantine measures in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

In addition to this on 24 March 2020 social leader Carlota Isabel Salina Pérez was killed, in San Pablo, South Bolívar. That night, armed men arrived at her house and having forced her to leave, they shot her a few meters away from her home. Since then her partner has disappeared. Carlota was a member of the Popular Women’s Organization (Organizacion Feminina Popular -OFP) where she was working with women farmers, leaders, defenders of victim’s rights and of a life free from violence.

Oidhaco expresses its profound concern regarding the risks and the accelerated rate at which Human Rights Defenders are being killed; which is once again surpassing previous historically high rates according to the German Institute, Capaz. The Colombian Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Indepaz), report that between 1 January and 10 March 2020, 57 social leaders and Human Rights Defenders have been killed in Colombia. According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 108 Human Rights Defenders were killed in Colombia in 2019. There is a danger, that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this grave situation in Colombia is becoming invisible, which in itself converts into another risk factor for Human Rights Defenders and social leaders in Colombia.

In order to avert further deterioration in the situation it is essential to listen to the call made by 120 organizations, among them Indigenous Authorities, humanitarian and biodiversity zones, farmer’s organizations and associations of internally displaced personas, from eight departments of Colombia which include: Putumayo, Chocó, Antioquia, Cauca, Valle del Cauca amongst others, who in an open



letter to armed groups and the military forces, are asking for an immediate ceasefire in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic:

*“Let us take advantage of COVID 19 to think about the life of every one of you, of every one of us, the life of the country, take up this reflection in your squads, fronts, brigades, battalions, commands. From our arrogance nothing will remain, neither from our vane pride. It is a time for solidarity and from there, for peace and a new democracy.”*

The call from the communities is for a bi-lateral cease fire, this is supported by the head of the United Nations, Antonio Gutierrez, who asked for hostilities at a global level to cease immediately in the crisis context of COVID-19.

Therefore we ask the European Union, European states and the United Nations to petition the Colombian government:

- to agree a bilateral ceasefire with the armed groups for the duration of the preventive measure against COVID-19;
- to include as part of the preventive measures taken in the context of the health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, an emergency plan for the protection of persons defending human rights and an immediate attention scheme in the case of attacks;
- to refrain from making statements that deny the nature of the killings of Human Rights Defenders and to comply with the Inspector General’s Directive, 002 of 2017 for the protection of those defending human rights
- to investigate the killings and attacks against Human Rights Defenders and bring those responsible to justice;
- to make progress with a comprehensive implementation of the agreements in the Peace Accord, thereby, contributing to the guarantees for Human Rights Defenders and those who undertake social leadership in support of the implementation of the Accord;
- to make progress with the implementation of measures for dismantling successor groups of paramilitary organizations and in the identification and prosecution of their backers, in the National Commission for Security Guarantees and the Special Unit for Investigation of the Attorney General’s office

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